



DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

Planning Division

m e m o r a n d u m

TO: Laurel Lunt Prussing, Mayor

FROM: Elizabeth H. Tyler, PhD., FAICP, Director

DATE: October 6, 2011

SUBJECT: Very Small Starts grant application and Green Street improvements

Introduction

The City of Urbana is working with the Champaign-Urbana Mass Transit District (CUMTD), the City of Champaign, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign on a Very Small Starts grant application to upgrade street infrastructure on high capacity transit corridors shared by these jurisdictions. CUMTD is leading this effort and is expected to submit the grant application on behalf of the participating agencies.

All items anticipated to be included in the grant application that fall within Urbana's jurisdiction are generally consistent with the Urbana Bicycle Master Plan and the 2005 Urbana Comprehensive Plan. One item expected to be included is a dedicated bus/bicycle lane for Green Street between Wright Street and Lincoln Avenue. To install a dedicated bus/bike lane, one traffic lane would be removed, and a dedicated bus/bike lane installed in its place. The facility would use existing right-of-way. The Urbana Bicycle Master Plan identifies bike lanes as the appropriate treatment for this section of Green Street, and does include the option of a dedicated bus/bike lane for this road segment.

City staff is seeking clarification from Urbana Mayor & City Council as to whether they would support a dedicated bus/bike lane for Green Street between Wright Street and Lincoln Avenue as part of a Very Small Starts grant application.

Discussion

Very Small Starts Grant

The Very Small Starts (VSS) grant is administered by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA). Unlike grant programs administered by the Federal Highways Administration which focus on street and highway infrastructure, the Very Small Starts grant provides funding for major transit investment projects such as light rail and bus rapid transit. The VSS grant provides federal funding of up to 80%. Although the anticipated grant application is not intended to create a traditional fixed guideway transit system like rail or trolley, proposed improvements to our existing system would include a segment in

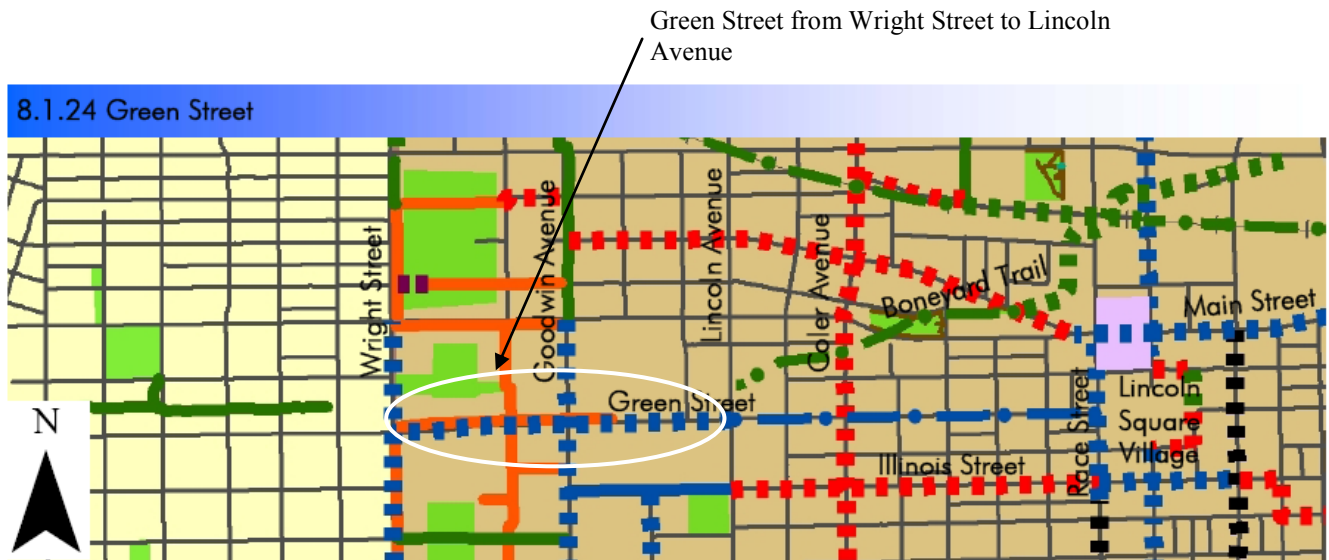
the University campus area dedicated to bus transit and cyclists. There are already dedicated bus lanes on certain segments of Wright Street.

The grant application that CUMTD is preparing includes many capital improvements across Urbana, Champaign, and the University of Illinois campus, including:

- Reconstruction of Green Street between Neil Street and Fourth Street to accommodate on-street bike lanes as well as signal improvements and sidewalk enhancements;
- Roadway rehabilitation and widening of Wright Street between Armory Avenue and Springfield Avenue to include on-street bike lanes and enhanced sidewalks;
- Installation of additional bus shelters and loading areas; and
- Increases in frequency of several of the most popular CUMTD routes.

Eligibility criteria for the grant include features such as ‘signal priority/pre-emption’ and dedicated bus lanes. The FTA has indicated that a grant application will score higher if a dedicated bus-only lane is included. A dedicated bus/bike lane may be considered for this criterion.

The 2008 Urbana Bicycle Master Plan recommends bike lanes for Green Street between Wright Street and Lincoln Avenue by 2013, as seen below.



- Race Street-Lincoln Avenue: Bike Lanes, upon decision of configuration west of Lincoln Avenue. On-street parking will no longer be allowed.
 - Destinations: Downtown (EB), Lincoln Square Village (EB), Urbana Free Library (EB), Campus (WB)
- Lincoln Avenue-Wright Street: Bike Lanes. Configuration to be determined. Shared bus/bike lanes are an option.
 - Destinations: Downtown (EB), Lincoln Square Village (EB), Urbana Free Library (EB), Campus (WB), Illini Union (WB)

Figure 8.1: Recommended Bicycle Network, from the 2008 Urbana Bicycle Master Plan

Although the Urbana Bicycle Master Plan recommends bike lanes for this segment of Green Street, it also specifies that ‘shared bus/bike lanes’ are an option (page 8-25). A shared bus/bike-only lane is a

travel lane dedicated for buses and bicyclists but prohibits travel by other vehicles. Such a lane would be nearly identical to marked shared lanes except that automobiles would be excluded other than when making a right turn.

A dedicated bus/bike lane, instead of bike lanes, is also being recommended for this segment of Green Street by TY Lin International, a consulting firm with expertise in this area. The University has been working with the cities of Urbana and Champaign, CUMTD, and CCRPC on a Campus Bicycle Plan. CUMTD commissioned TY Lin to prepare a study of bus and bicycle interaction at certain “hotspots” in the campus area. TY Lin’s study recommends a dedicated bus/bike lane for Green Street between Wright Street and Lincoln Avenue. According to the study, a dedicated lane would accommodate the high frequency of buses along this section of Green Street while encouraging bicyclists to ride in a location where they are more visible to bus operators approaching from behind as well as to overtake stopped buses on the left side where they are more visible to bus operators. A copy of this study is available on the City’s website at <http://urbanaininois.us/boards/plan-commission/meetings/2011-08-18-0>.

The Urbana Plan Commission & the Urbana Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission

On August 18, 2011, the Urbana Plan Commission and the Urbana Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Commission (BPAC) held a joint information session regarding the grant application as it pertains to a dedicated bus/bike lane for Green Street between Wright Street and Lincoln Avenue.

At their September 20, 2011 meeting, BPAC further discussed a dedicated bus/bike lane for this segment of Green Street and voted unanimously to support such a facility.

Requested Action

City staff is seeking a motion of support from the Urbana City Council as to whether they would support a dedicated bus/bike lane for Green Street between Wright Street and Lincoln Avenue as part of a Very Small Starts grant application to the Federal Transit Administration.

Prepared by:

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Attachments:

Exhibit A: Very Small Starts Fact Sheet



Very Small Starts Fact Sheet

OCTOBER 4, 2011

A SECTION 5309 CAPITAL INVESTMENT GRANT PROGRAM

The Federal Transit Administration (FTA) administers the Section 5309 Capital Investment Grant program, which provides capital funds for major transit investment projects. The Section 5309 Capital Investment Grants program now includes a new project category called "Very Small Starts." These projects are simple, low-risk projects that qualify for a highly simplified project evaluation and rating process by FTA.

Does your project qualify as a Very Small Start?

In order to qualify for the streamlined Very Small Starts evaluation and rating process, a project must be a bus, rail or ferry project and contain the following features:

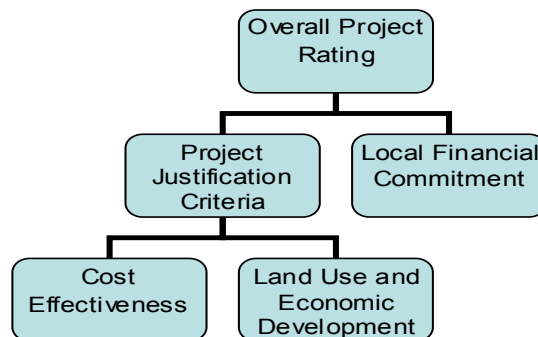
- Transit Stations
- Signal Priority/Pre-emption (for Bus/LRT)
- Low Floor / Level Boarding Vehicles
- Special Branding of Service
- Frequent Service - 10 min peak/15 min off peak
- Service offered at least 14 hours per day
- Existing corridor ridership exceeding 3,000/day
- Less than \$50 million total cost
- Less than \$3 million per mile (excluding vehicles)



This photo represents a substantial and branded transit station with an integrated passenger information system

How are Very Small Starts projects evaluated?

The following illustrates the project rating process and evaluation criteria for Very Small Starts projects:



Project Justification Criteria – automatically receives a medium rating

- Cost Effectiveness – By their very nature Very Small Starts projects are cost effective and therefore receive a "Medium" rating.
- Land Use and Economic Development - Also due to the scale of Very Small Starts projects, this criteria also automatically receives a medium rating

Local Financial Commitment – a project will receive a medium rating if it can demonstrate:

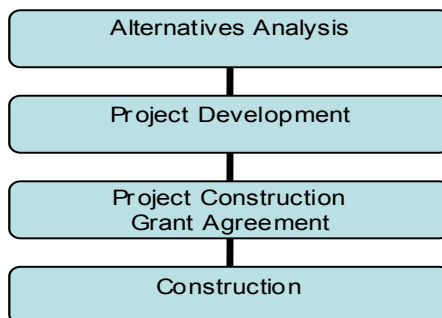
- Funds are available for the local share
- The additional operating and maintenance costs of the project are less than 5% of the agency's operating budget, and
- The agency is in reasonably good financial condition

What is the project development process for Small Starts?

During the planning and project development process, FTA evaluates the project's justification and local financial commitment and the sponsor addresses any remaining planning, environmental, engineering, and design issues and requirements. FTA is required by law to approve the initiation of project development and to make funding recommendations after project development is complete.



Kansas City MAX BRT Vehicle



Alternatives Analysis

By law, FTA must consider the results of planning and alternatives analysis (AA) when evaluating proposed projects. Very Small Starts may utilize a very simple AA process.

Project Development

For Very Small Starts projects, preliminary engineering and final design work is combined into one phase referred to as Project Development. Below are the criteria that must be met for approval into Project Development:

Project Development Approval Criteria

- Complete Alternatives Analysis
- Adopt Locally Preferred Alternative (LPA)
- LPA included within the MPO's long range plan
- Complete NEPA scoping
- Receive a "Medium" rating or better from FTA

In addition, a project sponsor must develop an acceptable Project Management Plan, including a fair and reasonable project budget and schedule.

Project Construction Grant Agreement

Financial assistance under Section 5309 for construction of a Very Small Starts project is provided through a Project Construction Grant Agreement (PCGA) that is negotiated during project development.

How is a Very Small Starts project recommended for funding?

Very Small Starts projects that meet the following conditions may be recommended for funding in the President's budget, subject to funding availability:

- The project must have been approved to enter into project development;
- The project must be "ready" to be implemented; and
- The project must be rated at least "medium."

As with all Section 5309 Capital Investment Grants, the rating process is separate from the budget decisions. Projects that achieve a "medium" or better rating will be eligible to receive Section 5309 Capital Investment Grant funds, but are not guaranteed to receive any funding in the President's Budget.



LACMTA Metro Rapid Vehicle